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ABSTRACT

Elementary schools are continuously growing in student population. The increase in student population requires innovative management practices aimed at uniting and furthering progress within school sites. While the increase in student enrollment coupled with growth in staff can be challenging, possibilities of seamless transitions of practice can yield fruitful outcomes in the management of multitrack year-round elementary sites. This paper exhibits practical management strategies suitable for elementary-site administrative teams. The purpose of this paper is to discuss management practices of value to year-round elementary school administrators and researchers. The viewpoints in this paper focus on administration and highlight the following: (1) administrative functions; (2) supervisory team and functions; (3) leadership team (teachers); (4) the external community; and (5) strategic planning. (Author)

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Management Strategies for Multi-Track, Year-Round Elementary Schools

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Management Strategies for Multi-Track, Year-Round Elementary Schools

Abstract

Elementary schools are continuously growing in student population; therefore, with the increase in student population requires innovative management practices aimed at uniting and furthering progress within school sites. While the increase in student enrollment coupled with growth in staff can be challenging, possibilities of seamless transitions of practice can yield fruitful outcomes in the management of multi-track, year-round elementary sites. This article exhibits practical management strategies suitable for elementary site administrative teams.

Introduction

As cities throughout the United States become more populated so does the educational system. One method of addressing the overpopulation of students within elementary schools is by way of transitioning to year-round calendars. More frequently, a year-round calendar resembles multi-tracks either differentiated by letters of the alphabet, such as tracks "A, B, C," etc and/or by color, such as blue or green track, etc. The year-round concept is unique in that the academic year is virtually

continuous year-round, without a prolonged closure and reopening of the school in between years.

With the year-round concept necessitates leadership/management strategies that somewhat differ from managing a conventional elementary school site. Year-round elementary sites tend to include a higher amount of students, which can range from 700 to over 1,500 students, akin a comprehensive high school. As student enrollment increases at elementary sites, more and more practices of management currently in place in high schools, which house more students become applicable for elementary management practitioners.

The purpose of this article is to discuss management practices of value to year-round elementary school administrators and researchers focusing on management practices within elementary schools. The practical viewpoints in this article will focus on administration and highlight the following:

1. Administrative Functions
2. Supervisory Team and Functions
3. Leadership Team (teachers)
4. The External Community
5. Strategic Planning

Administrative Functions

The administrative teams (i.e., principal and vice-principal) in elementary schools vary depending on the student enrollment. It is common for elementary schools with less than approximately 600 students to have only one administrator (principal). While sites with over 600 students tend to have a vice-principal, too; however, sites larger than perhaps 1,000 students may have more than one vice-principal. Shared leadership is a necessity, as principals will continue to encounter change revolving around delegation of responsibilities and organizational decision-making (Kaplan & Owings, 1999). Distribution of administrative duties is a must in order for a principal to avoid being overwhelmed.

Taking an example of a site housing at least one vice-principal would require a distribution of job functions. The functions should be "administrative" in nature and focusing on administering the school site. With the many challenges public education is facing today as far as increasing student academic achievement, it is necessary that site administrators continually focus on academic programs and school safety. When possible, delegation of tedious, time-consuming dilemmas should be delegated to specialists and teachers, fulfilling adjunct duties.

More specially, administrators must be spending a greater percentage of their day meeting and discussing grade by grade-level, strategies to increase academic levels while maintaining a safe school environment that has a high morale among faculty and staff alike. While student discipline can take a great percentage of an administrator's time, having a sound school-wide discipline system in place can remedy a greater amount of discipline problems.

Administrative meetings are a necessity and should take place once a week, for at least one hour. During this time weekly issues including progress towards projects can be discussed. Within this time or a one-half hour timeslot should be devoted to the school site leadership team, consisting of the custodian supervisor, school secretary, counselor, program specialists, etc. While this meeting is less focused on planning of curriculum, a heavier emphasis should be placed on calendar items/goals. A weekly bulletin is necessary and can be used to communicate such topics; however, physical communication of stakeholders has the potential to surface powerful outcomes. A weekly bulletin is more appropriate for teachers and staff as it is more difficult to gather on a weekly basis.

In sum, administrative functions should be geared towards managing the forward progress of the elementary site. Many daily challenges face school administrators; however, with proper delegation and planning, which will be discussed at a later point in this article, more time can be available for strategic planning. Lastly, as elementary sites attendance levels increase, it is necessary for administrative teams to function like high school teams. Each member is solely in charge of specific administrative duties. A crossing of paths between two administrators may result confusing outcomes as one administrator may require or function differently than another.

Even though the principal is the leader of the site, a delegation of administrative duties to his or her assistant(s) is necessary without intrusion. To better describe intrusion would be to use an example of a family. A son or daughter wants something so she/he asks the mother for it and the mom says "no." Next, behind the back of the mother, the child asks the father, with hopes of saying, "yes," of course.

Supervisory Team and Functions

As previously alluded to, supervisory teams and appropriate functions are a major necessity within a comprehensive, large elementary school. Supervisory teams generally consist of the school counselor, program specialists, custodian supervisor, kitchen manager, and school secretary. Such teams should meet at least on a weekly basis to discuss outcomes and/or future issues. The major intent of the meeting is to communicate each individual's calendar for the week(s) to follow.

Kitchen and custodian supervisors are equally important in elementary schools, as far as contributing to the leadership functions; however, counselors, secretaries, and program specialists are more directly involved with academic program functions. The school counselors are necessary in elementary schools and are able to assist the school site in many ways. A general description of a counselor's duties includes of course, counseling students and conducting health and student leadership types of activities, such as student council. With the assistance of classroom teachers, many of such student leadership programs can be successfully implemented. A monumental task of the school counselor should be to manage the team meetings/referrals for

students having academic and/or behavior problems. This task should be prioritized as it can assist the administrative team by dealing with less discipline problems.

The school secretary is one that is more knowledgeable about the everyday functions of the school site and should serve as next in charge, after administration. A secretary continually, professionally developing in all areas of the elementary school adds net worth to the entire elementary school. Furthermore, in many cases, the school secretary has witnessed many administration changeovers and potentially can contribute to discussions regarding what has and has not worked, historically.

The program specialist(s) can be utilized as quasi-curriculum leaders at school sites. Their professional services range from serving as curriculum resources to all teachers to handling Title 1 programs, such as bilingual education issues, etc. A program specialist can best serve as a change agent, where he/she inservices teachers on both new and most effective classroom instructional practices. Program specialists are generally well respected by their peers (teachers); therefore, can successfully assist by bringing about change.

While program specialists are often viewed as a lesser-expensive administrator, as they do many administrative functions, they should best be utilized with the aim to allow administrator to have time to plan/administer progress. In brief, program specialists should include in their daily/weekly schedules opportunities to work with teachers in need of assistance and handle Title 1 issues, such as state/district compliance factors.

Again, to briefly summarize the discussions thus far, the management strategies exposed are aimed at elementary schools with only one or two administrators. Many administrators find themselves working 10 plus hours, daily. The objective of these strategies is to free-up more administrative time to be utilized on global elementary site functions.

Leadership Team

Effective leadership teams include and focus on administration, one representative from each grade level and the program specialist(s). Such meetings should take place at least on a bi-weekly basis. The focus of the agenda should be on academic issues, solely. While the meeting provides an opportunity for teachers to express concerns regarding their respective

classrooms/grade levels, the intent of the meeting should be to share results of progress being made and actions to be taken. Furthermore, leadership teams result in a resource often more valuable than what a principal for example, can alone offer, which is a distinguishing benefit of collaborating (Hart, 1996).

The leadership team should be then communicating the discussions and actions with the grade level teachers. This process is most successful when leadership representatives agree and understand what has been discussed, as a result, will have better buy-in from their peers when reporting actions.

The External Community

Members of a school's community, such as neighbors, parents of students, and local businesses all have the potential to contribute towards a school's academic and safety progress issues. An example of a successful collaboration is the "Accelerated Schools Project," which involves school stakeholders in addressing school-wide problems by way of action research (McCarthy & Riner, 1996: 223 [Electronic version]). While elementary schools house different make-up of students, such as urban schools may have a higher percentage of Title 1 students (bilingual, etc.), it is

important to consider an alliance with parents as top priority. The single most important strategy is to utilize the relationship between teachers and their students' parents. In many instances, the lower level elementary grades offer the most parent participation.

Parent participation within classrooms, if designed effectively, can assist teachers significantly in the classroom. Let us consider a school of 800 students, if only 10% of the students' parents participate on a monthly basis, the site would have some 80 parent participants, monthly, which is 20 parents a week! However, a 10% figure may not be realistic on a monthly basis, but it can serve as a target. Parents, in many instances are interested in participating, regardless of their primary language; however, many feel intimidated to do so. It is the school's responsibility (administration) to design parent groups to relieve the tension.

A solicitation by the administration to local business owners serves as an opportunity for schools to connect with the business community. One strategy is to invite local businesses to school functions or a visit. Ask the representatives to introduce themselves to the students during an assembly. Perhaps inquire about building a network or relationship with that business. Many small and large neighboring businesses are excited about being

recognized in the community and are willing to assist the school site. The important note is to approach businesses with the intent of forming a relationship aside from asking for monetary or product donations.

Local neighbors housed within steps of a school are valuable, too. In many cases, they wish to serve the school with services ranging from monitoring the campus, informally on the weekends, to donating hours in the school. In brief, building a close relationship with the community can ultimately enhance a school's political image and indirectly assist in the quest to increasing academic achievement. All too often, neighbors and local businesses, including calling on parents, are not top priority as a result of limited administration time available due to other issues occurring daily. With the effective utilization of site stakeholders would allow administration to solicit valuable options, such as the involvement of the external community in the school.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a necessary component within the arena of management, in general. Organizations, such as schools in

the 21st Century should be prepared to change according to conditions (White, 2002). Strategic functions are only as effective as the planning and vision behind the intent for further action. Otherwise, spontaneous behaviors may either be premature and/or chaotic, resulting in unfavorable outcomes. Noteworthy to say is strategic planning alone is surely not as effective as planning with continuous reviews. All futuristic plans may limit performance outcomes should life cycle reviews not be conducted. It is necessary to assess stages of strategic planning aimed at the objective of increasing student academic achievement, etc.

Strategic functions commonly include management teams (leadership, administration, etc.) coupled with staff, such as teachers in the case of elementary schools. School administrators must plan for the future in mind. The inclusion of knowledge management principles should be considered, that is, soliciting knowledge from site stakeholders to consider/apply to the future plans of the school site. Strategic discussions should take place on a bi-weekly basis, at least, during leadership or isolated meeting sessions. A school plan is the common result of strategic planning.

Multi-track, year-round elementary schools are naturally large and comprehensive; therefore, it is necessary to plan

strategically with clear and limited, measurable objectives in mind. The planning must include all stakeholders at the site and must be clearly understood by all, as well. Lastly, the objectives must be reviewed on at least a monthly basis.

Conclusion

The following components discussed in this article are practical and focused on assisting a principal manage a multi-track, year-round elementary school. While there are many components in schools to manage the most significant are utilizing administrative functions effectively. It is necessary to delegate responsibilities in order to free time to address other tasks. The supervisory and leadership team members serve as the supporting leaders of the school. Each member directly has the potential to contribute towards the school site's strategies, with potential to increase student achievement and school safety.

Lastly, the external community serves the school site in many ways, such as providing teachers support by working with students. Also, assisting with school safety measures, etc. In order to seamlessly design and implement the steps discussed in this article, strategic planning is a necessary component. The leadership

team members along with administration must spend sufficient time thinking and envisioning future plans aimed at improving a site and increasing student academic achievement.

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